Executive Summary – Survey Results

Purpose:

The University of Southern Maine (USM) Office of Research Administration and Development conducted a study of faculty and research staff to identify perceived incentives and disincentives in pursuing Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity (RSCA) at USM as well as areas of RSCA strengths. We have never had systematic internal input from the faculty and research staff about the state of RSCA at USM. The results of this study provide information to better support USM faculty and research staff in their RSCA pursuits and for the administration to more aggressively seek resources to carry out such efforts.

Methodology

This survey was a collaborative development between the Office of Research and Development, the Research Council (RC), the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP), the Muskie School’s Survey Research Center. As an incentive to participate, respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a raffle for an iPad2 upon completion of the survey. In general, questions were structured for Likert scale responses (e.g. strongly disagree to strongly agree, never to frequently, very likely to not likely). Qualitative responses were also obtained. Faculty self identified their field of study and academic rank: assistant, associate or full professor.

Approximately 550 invitations were distributed to faculty and staff by email on August 25, 2011, although it was later found that the list provided included a large number of duplicates. The unduplicated number was approximately 467.

ORIO staff determined that further review by the IRB was not required. The survey was also reviewed and approved by AFUM.

The survey was made available on the internet from on August 23, 2011 to November 15, 2011. It was administered using Snap Survey Software, a secure online survey software for protected information. Two emails were sent to faculty and research staff two weeks apart, with an additional reminder phone call.

The data were examined in total, and then were further analyzed to look at differences between groups of respondents based upon their field of study and faculty academic rank.
A content analysis of open-ended questions was conducted by six Research Council Members. This content analysis, which entails an examination of key words from responses to those questions, is continuing.

**Results**

*Characteristics of respondents*

- 271 Faculty and Research staff -- 234 full time faculty, 6 joint faculty/research and 31 professional research staff -- responded to the survey for a 58% response rate.
- 86% of the respondents were faculty - 26.9% from sciences and health, 43.2% from humanities, social sciences and arts, 27.3% from public policy, education and business, 6.6% from law.
- 48% of respondents are associate professors, and 38% are full professors. 25% of all respondents have been at USM for > 20 years.

*Perceptions of support*

- One strength frequently cited by faculty and research staff of USM was the creativity, passion, energy and flexibility of the highly committed faculty.
- Another strength cited was that faculty and research staff considered RSCA highly important personally (74.7%), and in tenure and promotion (57.1%).
- Faculty and research staff responded that they would be very likely (27%) and likely (39.3%) to collaborate with other USM Faculty, if there was a formal mechanism to do so.
- Most Faculty and research staff (61.9%) see their community of scholarship as external.
- Faculty and research staff responded (60.9% all the time and 36% sometimes) that they regularly incorporated their research and scholarly activities into their teaching.
- Faculty and research staff found OSP (51.4%) and colleagues (55.5%) to be the most helpful in facilitating the external grant-seeking process.
- Faculty and research staff reported that they were confident in their ability to develop a research project/proposal (60.4%), write a grant proposal (55%), conduct research (75.6%) and develop a grant budget (38.8%).

*Perceptions of barriers*

- Faculty and research staff perceived very little support for research, scholarship and creative activity (RSCA) from administration (low 54%, none 4%).
- There is a lack of standardization of expectations for scholarly activity.
- Faculty and research staff are not interested in collaboration and interdisciplinary research because it is not seen as valued in tenure and promotion.
- Most faculty and research staff do not see their community of scholarship as internal to USM.
- The top ranking disincentive for faculty and research staff is lack of time (67%), followed by lack of institutional support (53.1%), administrative support (40.4%) and institutional cost share (32.9%).
- Many faculty and research staff cited excess service responsibilities as the top time sink [rather than teaching].
- Lack of incentives for RSCA, along with lack of indirect return, were frequently cited as reasons for lack of interest and progress in RSCA.
- Faculty and research staff indicated a lack of confidence in the ability to gain institutional support for their work. 35.5% responded “not confident” and 43.9% responded “somewhat confident”. Faculty also indicated a lack in confidence in sustaining the work beyond the grant period with 28.2% responding “not confident” and 37% responding only “somewhat confident”.
- Faculty and research staff in the humanities and social sciences cited a perceived lack of funding opportunities as one of their top disincentives for RSCA.

**Directions for a Strategic Plan**

- Administration needs a plan for future focus centered on research clusters as a means for building community, increasing visibility, leveraging external resources, investing internal resources and supporting and recognizing productive faculty.